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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify effective recruitment techniques as reported by students within baccalaureate automotive technology programs. Participants in the study were 382 students (freshmen through seniors) of 8 universities in the United States that offer automotive technology baccalaureate degrees. The following sixteen recruitment factors were isolated and rated by the students: friends at college or high school; college catalog; high school/community college counselor or teacher; parents and relatives; university alumni; reputation of the automotive program; technology recruitment activities; university recruiters visiting high school; athletic advisor or coach; admissions office at the university; campus visit; reputation of the university; university recruiters visiting community college; location; bulletin board advertising at student's school; promotional materials; and articulation or direct transfer from community college. Student ratings showed the following five recruitment factors to be the most influential: reputation of the automotive program; reputation of the university; job placement and career opportunities; parents and relatives; campus visit; and recommendation of the automotive teacher. (Contains 28 references.) (KC)

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENTS TO ATTEND FOUR-YEAR AUTOMOTIVE PROGRAMS

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The purpose of this study was to identify effective recruitment techniques as reported by students within baccalaureate automotive technology programs. Participants in the study were 382 students (Freshman through Seniors) of eight universities in the United States that offer automotive technology baccalaureate degrees. Reputation of the automotive program, job placement/career opportunities, and referral of a high school automotive teacher were found as critical influential recruitment factors.

Technology is rapidly growing in all areas. With this growth, many different occupations are being affected. Automotive technology is an occupation that is being greatly affected by changing technology and industry standards. Current automobiles are a challenge to repair because of the advanced technology, but the future automobile will be even more complicated than these. Examples of this advanced technology includes; navigational systems that use Global Positioning Satellites; electronic traffic monitoring; and automatic braking and steering systems (Riley, 1995). This advanced technology will require automotive technicians to have greater skills and knowledge in this area. This creates the need for individuals who are working in the area of service management to have advanced knowledge and skills as well. Service managers and technicians with advanced technical skills on automobiles are in demand and it is anticipated this demand will continue to grow in the future (Cornish, 1996).

To meet demands for these workers, schools need to be preparing individuals within these areas. Enrollment in these programs is needed so as to prepare enough individuals to meet the future demands. Research by Butler, Izadi, and Toosi (1994) sought to determine whether enrollment in Industrial Technology (for which automotive technology is a part) was a current concern. They conducted a national study that included 18 of the 20 accredited Industrial Technology programs in the country. Of the 73 rankings, "What recruiting strategies have proven successful in attracting high school students in two-year and four-year Industrial Technology programs?" was ranked number eighteen.

Eight universities in the United States currently offer baccalaureate degrees in Automotive Technology. Each of the automotive department heads at these universities was contacted prior to this study and they stated that the optimum enrollment for their program was higher than their current enrollment. All department heads indicated the extensive demand for their students upon graduation as well.

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Theoretical Framework

Student Enrollment Behavior Theory

The concern for student count both generally in universities and in technology areas has been addressed in recent research. Because of this concern, a technology educator must study student enrollment behavior theory. This section will look at the prominent models of enrollment behavior.

Student Enrollment Behavior Theory Models

Models for student enrollment behavior theory started to emerge in the early 1980's (Paulsen, 1990). Several multi-stage models began to develop (Hanson & Litten, 1982; and Kotler & Fox, 1985). However, Hossler and Gallagher, (1987) and Jackson, (1982) developed a 3-stage model that has become the most widely accepted model in enrollment behavior. The steps include: a) college aspiration, b) search and application, and c) selection and attendance.

Stage 1 - College aspiration. The first stage of student choice is the college aspiration stage. This stage typically involves the student from early childhood through high school. In this stage, the student decides whether he/she wants to attend college or not (Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990). The biggest factors that affect the decision are: a) family background, b) academic ability, and c) high school and neighborhood context (Paulsen, 1990).

Stage 2 - Search and application. Once the student has decided that he/she will attend college, he/she enters the second stage, which is the "search and application" stage. In this stage the students begin to seek and acquire information about colleges that they are considering (Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990). Institutional characteristics are important in this stage; Ihlanfeldt (1980) identified four major characteristics that affect the second stage decisions. The first major characteristic is the programs or fields of study. Students narrow their choices down based on what subject area they are interested in studying. The second major area is the quality or reputation of the program or university. Students are concerned about the quality of the education that they will receive and the reputation of their degree. The area that affects this decision is the cost of going to a specific school. Cost include tuition and living at the university. The fourth characteristic that is important is the location of the university. Most students prefer to go to college close to home. The location of the school is a determining factor in stage two of the model.

Stage 3 - Selection and attendance. The third stage of "selection and attendance" is the final stage. This stage incorporates the student's decision or actual choice of a university from the colleges that actually accepted them as a student. Research has indicated there are ten major attributes of institutions that strongly influence the student's decision in the final selection. These ten attributes are: a) cost, b) financial aid, c) programs, d) size, e) location, f) quality, g) social atmosphere, h) athletics, i) religious emphasis, and j) jobs available (Paulsen, 1990).

Problem Statement

Recruitment efforts are a major component for enhancing enrollment. However, crucial recruitment factors within baccalaureate automotive technology areas have not been identified, nor is it known whether the successful recruitment factors that have been identified for academic programs can be generalized to four-year automotive technology students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify effective recruitment factors as reported by students within baccalaureate automotive technology programs. Though both two-year and four-year automotive programs are important, this study looked at the recruitment factors that enhanced the student's decision to attend four-year automotive programs. The primary objective of this study was to identify how four-year automotive

students rated the influence that different components or techniques had on them in attending a four-year program.

Factors That Influence Student Enrollment Behavior

From the literature, the following sixteen items that influence enrollment behavior were chosen. An additional item, reputation of automotive program, was added based upon the recommendation of the panel of experts. Recruitment items include: (a) friend(s) at university/community college or high school (b) reading this university's catalog, (c) high school/community college counselor/teacher, (d) parent(s)/relatives, (e) alumni of this university, (f) reputation of automotive program, (g) technology recruitment activities, (h) university recruiters visiting my high school, (i) athletic advisor/coach, (j) admission office at this university, (k) campus visit, (l) reputation of the university, (m) university recruiters visiting my community college, (n) community in which university is located, (o) bulletin board advertising at my previous school, (p) promotional materials (brochures, letters, videos), and (q) articulation or direct transfer from community college.

Friend(s) at university/community college or high school

Litten (1989) notes that prospective students regard currently enrolled students as one of the best sources of information about a school. "Targeted peer recruitment can be one of the most effective means of marketing. Its success can be attributed to the fact that current students are current consumers, are close in age to the prospective students, and usually "tell it like it is" when discussing college" (Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990, p. 106). Edmund's (1980) study supported these statements and it found that a highly influential factor for a student choosing a 4-year technical degree was that college students recruited other college students and/or college students recruited high school students.

Reading this university's catalog

Hossler, Bean, & Associates (1990) identified the schools catalog as one type of publication that may move the prospective student from inquiry to application. Paulsen (1990) reported that college publications as one of the six most preferred information source for both parents and students.

High school/community college counselor/teacher

Alumni play a strong role in influencing students on college selection. Teachers (especially technology education or industrial arts teachers) who are alumni have a strong influence (Devier, 1982; Edmunds, 1980; and Isbell & Lovedahl, 1989). These past three studies all found that the number one influence of recruitment into university industrial arts/technology education programs came from high school industrial arts/technology education teachers.

Devier (1982) found: "College personnel contacts with industrial arts teachers, especially alumni, also had the highest effectiveness rating from the students" (p. 30). Edmunds (1980) found: "The most effective means of recruitment was judged to be contacts with industrial arts teachers who are alumni" (p. 19). Isbell and Lovedahl (1989) found: "... the technique that received the highest ranking was referral, by high school industrial arts/technology education teachers" (p. 38). In the area of Industrial Technology, Izadi and Toosi (1995) indicated the third most effective recruitment technique in their study was the high school counselor/teacher. Demuth's (1986) study of recruitment into area vocational/technical schools also found that high school counselors ranked seventh, and high school teachers ranked eighth.

Parent(s)/relatives

Research strongly suggested that parents have a strong effect on a student's choice of colleges (Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990; Major, 1991; Mitchell, 1994; and Speelman & Stein, 1993). It was also found by Mitchell's (1994) that parents were ranked second as influencing students not to attend an area technical school. Sander's (1985) study on influences of decisions to attend 4-year mechanical power technology programs found that parents ranked eighth out of 25 influences.

Alumni of this university

Past studies have emphasized that alumni of the university are an important aspect of promotion and recruitment for schools (Devier, 1982; Edmunds, 1980; Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990; and Isbell & Lovedahl, 1989). Isbell and Lovedahl (1989) found that former students were consistently ranked within the top three recruitment techniques in their study of 169 universities. Devier (1982), in his study on recruitment in industrial arts programs indicated teachers who were alumni tended to be important recruitment tools. Edmund's (1980) previous study agreed with Devier's in this aspect and stated that one of the most effective means of recruitment was from industrial arts teachers who were alumni.

Reputation of automotive program

Reputation of the automotive program was not an initial influencer that was identified from the literature. Several of the students who were a part of the panel of experts emphasized that the reputation of the automotive program had a strong influence on them attending a four-year automotive program. Based upon this response, the reputation of the automotive program was included in this survey.

Technology recruitment activities

Izadi and Toosi (1995) indicated that recruitment activities from the specific technology programs were important to student recruitment. These activities could vary but the specific technology programs were responsible for them.

University recruiters visiting my high school

Hossler, Bean, & Associates (1990) stated that individual visits to high schools by admission personnel were a useful method to recruit students. These visits may also include college days and fairs that are staffed by admission personnel, alumni or qualified volunteers.

Athletic advisor/coach

Izadi & Toosi (1995) identified the athletic advisor/coach as another influencer of students attending certain post-secondary education entities. This was one of sixteen influencer used in their study.

Admission office at this university

Paulsen (1990) reported that the officers from the admission office were one of the six most preferred information sources. Hossler, Bean, & Associates (1990) stated that individuals within the admissions office played significant role in selling the university and its programs to perspective students.

Campus visit

Research indicates that having prospective students on campus is one of the most effective recruitment tools, (Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990; Isbell & Lovedahl, 1989; Litten, 1989; Mobley, 1988; Wanat & Bowles, 1992; and Williams, 1993). Wanat and Bowles (1992) found that campus visits were viewed as the most powerful source of information in helping students to make a decision about a school and the most effective recruiting activity used by college admission officers. Craft (1980) also stated that tours of college or university industrial laboratory facilities by prospective students rank high in influences on students. Hossler, Bean, & Assoc. (1990) further supported this and stated that the campus visit is the most influential factor for a students to decide to enroll in a college or university.

Reputation of the university

The image and/or reputation of an institution can play a key role in the college selection process. Paulsen (1990) described a comprehensive study of 3,000 high school seniors. They were asked to examine and rank

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by importance a list of 25 institutional characteristics. Among the eight top responses were the general academic reputation and faculty teaching reputation.

University recruiters visiting my community college

Hossler, Bean, and Assoc. (1990) stated individual visits by admission representatives to community colleges and companies can be a useful method for recruiting students. Past studies indicated that a visit either to a college or high school was an influencer to students attending that university (Williams, 1993; Craft, 1980).

Community in which university is located

When looking at institutional characteristics, Paulsen (1990) indicated that students ranked the distance from their home to the university high. He also stated that colleges become less attractive to students as the distance from home to college increases. Ihlanfeldt (1980) also stated that university location was one of four characteristics that were of pivotal importance.

Bulletin board advertising at my previous school

Izadi & Toosi (1995) identified that bulletin board advertising as influencer of students to attend universities. These bulletin boards could either be located at a community college or high school.

Promotional materials (brochures, letters, videos)

Promotional videotapes have been used to market specific programs to encourage enrollment (Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990; Owens, 1988, 1989; and Mobley, 1988). Mobley (1988) stated that a student-oriented video tend to raise the general interest of students in technology/vocational classes. He further stated that the development of a video to recruit females into the Industrial Technology program at Southeastern Louis iana University resulted in a 50% increase in female enrollment into the Industrial Technology program.

Written communications can take on varying forms in the area of recruitment. Personalized letters from the university to a prospective student can by effective in recruitment and attainment (Mobley, 1988). Isbell and Lovedahl (1989) recommended in their study that faculty should keep in touch with students who are recommended or inquire about a program. They further stated that interested high school students should be invited, through personalized letters, to visit the department.

Articulation or direct transfer from community college

Articulations between schools or 2+2 or 2+2+2 and school-to-work programs have also worked well as recruitment tools (Bickart, 1991; Isbell & Lovedahl, 1989; and Shaw, 1994). Bickart (1994) recommended that faculty utilize articulation. He stated that partnerships between industry and the K-12 schools would enrich their academic preparation for the study at the university. He also emphasized that articulation should continued to be developed or expanded from transfer programs with community colleges. Shaw's (1994) research of articulation into Industrial Technology programs indicated the importance of using articulation as a tool in recruitment. He stated that involvement in 2+2+2 tech-prep projects should be an important priority of the university. Isbell and Lovedahl's (1989) recommended that faculty should continue to articulate their programs to community and technical schools because these are a valuable resource for transfer students.

Method

Population

The target population for this study was the eight universities in the United States that offer Automotive Technology baccalaureate degrees. The eight schools included the following: (1) Ferris State University in Big Rapids, MI, (2) Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, KS, (3) Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in Carbondale, IL, (4) University of Southern Colorado in Pueblo, CO, (5) Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, MO, (6) Weber State University in Ogden, UT, (7) Montana State University -

Northern in Havre, MT, and (8) Indiana State University in Terre Haute, IN. All freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors from each school were asked to participate in the study (N=607).

The highest response category consisted of seniors (42.1%), followed by juniors (24.1%), sophomores (17.5%), and freshman (16.2%). Of the students that responded, the majority were males (94.8%) and a white racial/ethnic background (88.0%).

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this study was developed from previously published instruments (Bickert, 1991; Carter & Garigan, 1979; Devier, 1982; Isbell & Lovedahl, 1989; Izadi & Toosi, 1995; Sanders, 1986; Speelman & Stein, 1993; Williams, 1980). The following five-part Likert-type scale was used for students to rate the importance of seventeen recruitment items: 1= not important, 2=slightly important, 3=important, 4=quite important, and 5=very important.

Validity and Reliability

A panel of experts was used to establish content and face validity for the survey. The panel consisted of three four-year automotive faculty, twenty of the four-year automotive students, one admission/recruitment specialist, one technical education faculty, four occupational and adult education faculty. The panel of experts was asked to confirm that the instrument had clearly defined items, make suggested changes to items, offer suggestions for the addition or deletion of items and make comments relevant to the overall format and appearance of the instrument. It was recommended by the students who participated in the panel of experts that an additional item "Reputation of Automotive Program" be added to the instrument.

After revisions were made to the instrument, it was pilot tested with a group of twenty students within the four-year automotive program at Pittsburg State University. To measure internal consistency, a Cronbach's alpha was calculated, resulting in $r = .84$.

Procedure

The department chairpersons for each of the eight universities were contacted by telephone by the researcher on January 27, 1997 to request their participation in this study. At this time, the chairpersons were asked the number of students in their four-year automotive programs. This allowed for the correct number of instruments to be sent to each school. On January 29, 1997 a packet of instruments were sent to each department chairperson with instructions on how to administer the instrument. Telephone calls to each department chairperson were made to obtain the best return rate possible. All eight of the universities agreed to participate. Of the 607 student surveys sent, 383 (63.09%) were returned. Of the 383 student surveys returned, 382 (99.74%) were usable. There was no attempt to follow-up non-respondents. Results will only be generalized to the respondents.

Results

Recruitment items (Table 1) that students indicated as very important included; Reputation of the Automotive program (62.3%), Reputation of the University (40.6%), and Parents/Relatives (24.1%). Parents/Relatives was almost a bi-modal item between the response categories of very important and quite important. A recruitment item indicated by students as quite important was Campus Visit (31.7%). Twelve of the recruitment items had a modal response in the not-important category.

Conclusions

Based upon the findings, it can be concluded that there are four recruitment items that four-year automotive students are influenced by: (a) reputation of the automotive program, (b) reputation of the university; (c) parents and relatives, and (d) campus visit. This differs from past research mainly because reputation of the specific program was not included in past research. As a reminder, the recruitment item "reputation of automotive program" was added because of suggestions from the panel of experts.

Reputation of the Automotive Program and University

The reputation of the automotive program was the most influential recruitment factor to the participants followed by the reputation of the university. There were no references from past research that included specific program reputation such as the automotive program. Past research agreed with what was found in this study pertaining to reputation of the university. Paulsen (1990) and Wanat and Bowles (1992) indicated that this was an important recruitment item. Automotive program recruiters should be aware of how influential the reputation of their program is to prospective students and take steps to bolster their reputation.

Parents and Relatives

This study yielded similar results in that parents and relatives are influential factors in students attending educational programs. Gray & Herr (1995) and Speelman & Stein (1993) found in their studies that parents continue to have a strong influence over the career or school choice that students make.

Campus Visits

Students indicated that campus visits were quite important to them in deciding to attend the four-year automotive program of their choice. This agrees with past research that indicated that having prospective students on campus is one of the most effective recruitment tools (Craft, 1980; Edmunds, 1980; Hossler, Bean, & Assoc., 1990; Isbell & Lovedahl, 1989; Litten, 1989; Mobley, 1988; Wanat & Bowles, 1992; and Williams, 1993). In addition to this, Wanat and Bowles (1992) stated that campus visits were viewed as the most powerful source of information in helping students to make a decision about a school and the most effective recruiting activity used by college admission officers.

Twelve of the items on the survey had modal responses of not important. It can be concluded that the respondents from this survey deem these as items of little influence to them attending a four-year automotive program. These findings are different than the findings of past research in the area of recruitment of students. This suggests that different items may influence students in different educational programs. Information such as this is important to university recruiters in that different influences within program areas may differ between these programs.

Two specific items dealt with community college students only. These were "university recruiters visiting my community college" and "articulation or direct transfer from community college." Both of these were indicated as not important within this study. An unknown factor here was the number of students that transferred from the community college level. If the number of transfer students was low, this is self-explanatory. If the number of transfer students was high, this would indicate to the four-year automotive programs that articulation and visits to community colleges might be of little importance as a recruitment tool.

Recommendations

Persons who are involved in Automotive Technology recruitment should become familiar with the findings of this study. In order to enhance the recruitment of students, specifically for four-year Automotive Technology programs, there are certain areas that these recruiters should focus their time and efforts on. Each of these areas will be discussed individually.

The reputation of the automotive programs can be communicated to the prospective student in several ways. Examples may include: (a) placement statistics printed and made available to the students; (b) ranking of the programs made available to the students; and (c) reputation of the program and career opportunities should be emphasized as faculty visit high schools and share with the high school or community college students.

Recruiters need to remain aware of the influence that parents and relatives have over prospective students. While communicating with perspective students about the program, they also need to be including parents in these communications as well.

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Table 1 Student Response to Recruitment Items

Recruitment Items	Non-Response		Not Important		Slightly Important		Important		Quite Important		Very Important	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Reputation of Automotive Program	1	0.3	10	2.6	15	3.9	31	8.1	87	22.8	238	62.3
Reputation of the University	1	0.3	30	7.9	28	7.3	63	16.5	105	27.5	155	40.6
Parent(s)/Relative(s)	4	1.0	69	18.1	39	10.2	87	22.8	91	23.8	92	24.1
Campus Visit	3	0.8	57	14.9	37	9.7	79	20.7	121	31.7	85	22.3
Reading University Catalog	2	0.5	77	20.2	79	20.7	119	31.2	76	19.9	29	7.6
Athletic Advisor/Coach	2	0.5	233	61.0	52	13.6	53	13.9	30	7.9	12	3.1
Bulletin Board Advertising at my Previous School	5	1.3	226	59.2	35	9.2	61	16.0	36	9.4	19	5.0
University Recruiters Visiting My Community College	3	0.8	221	57.9	32	8.4	50	13.1	43	11.3	33	8.6
Articulation or Transfer from Community College	2	0.5	190	49.7	27	7.1	71	18.6	46	12.0	46	12.0
University Recruiters Visiting High School	2	0.5	177	46.3	50	13.1	58	15.2	57	14.9	38	9.9
Admission Office at This University	0	0.0	162	42.4	68	17.8	73	19.1	51	13.4	28	7.3
Alumni of this University	5	1.3	139	36.4	60	15.7	71	18.6	59	15.4	48	12.6
Promotional Material (Brochures, Letters, Videos)	5	1.3	127	33.2	53	13.9	77	20.2	83	21.7	37	9.7
Community in which University is Located	1	0.3	122	31.9	50	13.1	63	16.5	96	25.1	50	13.1
Friends at University/Community College/High School	2	0.5	115	30.1	52	13.6	68	17.8	71	18.6	74	19.4
High School/Community College Counselor/Teacher	6	1.6	97	25.4	51	13.4	75	19.6	80	20.9	73	19.1
Technology Recruitment Activities	2	0.5	98	25.7	53	13.9	79	20.7	89	23.3	61	16.0

Note. Modal responses are in bold

Campus visits should be included in the recruitment process to enhance students enrolling and attending four-year automotive programs. If program recruiters are not currently using this method for recruitment, it is recommended that they begin such. If recruiters are currently using this process, it is recommended that they continue using it.

For future study it is recommended that research be conducted on how to incorporate the reputation of the automotive program and career opportunities into formal recruitment plans. In addition, since reputation of the automotive program was ranked the highest, it is recommended to research what reputation means to prospective students.

This study concentrated on the items that influenced students to attend four-year automotive programs. It is recommended that studies be conducted to determine what those factors are that prevent students from majoring in automotive technology. It is further recommended that more in-depth research using qualitative methods be used to provide a more in-depth and insightful data in this area.

Since it was found that different recruitment items influenced four-year automotive program students to attend, it is recommended that all vocational/technical based programs research the recruitment items that may be more influential to their students. They may discover different findings than that of academic programs.

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